

FIRST MINISTER PULLING OUT OF NEWS XCHANGE CONFERENCE

The First Minister had agreed to giving a welcoming speech at the News Xchange conference in Edinburgh on 13 November. The conference is a two-day, annual conference focusing on ideas, opportunities and challenges for the international news industry. It brings together 600+ executives, journalists, presenters, bloggers and start-up entrepreneurs from all around the world to share, learn and cross-pollinate ideas with an array of experts, scientists, artists and thought leaders. The conference will be held at the EICC.

The conference has 4 themes:

1. Representation in the news room. This will include topics such as class and social backgrounds. ITV will moderate this section.
2. Activism. This is about social movements such as #MeToo and Parkland (the school shooting). The keynote will include a student from Parkland.
3. Misinformation debate. Truth and lies. How do we navigate this? Speaker will include the Daphne Project and Pulitzer prizewinners from Reuters.
4. Innovation and new technology and new opportunities and connecting with audiences. Speakers will include Google Voice. There will be a session on podcasting. There will be a large session on AI and machine learning.

On Wednesday 17 October officials and Spads had a call with the organisers and it was made clear that [Redacted] was among the speakers. They said they were aware that [Redacted] was a choice of speaker that will not be liked by everyone but that this had been signed off at a high level in the BBC.

On Saturday 20 October FM announced on Twitter that she was pulling out of the conference. She said:

"I believe passionately in free speech but as @ScotGovFM I have to make balanced judgments - and I will not be part of any process that risks legitimising or normalising far right, racist views. I regret that the BBC has put me and others in this position."

And later:

"The email the BBC sent to my office justifying Bannon's inclusion described him as a 'powerful and influential figure...promoting an anti-elite movement.' This kind of language to describe views that many would describe as fascist does seem to me to run the risk of normalisation."

Lines to take:

As the First Minister has clearly set out, she will not be part of any process that risks legitimising or normalising far right, racist views. I fully support her decision to pull out of the conference.

